

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

Washington, D.C. 20515

February 18, 2014

The Honorable Fred Upton  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Ed Whitfield  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Energy and Power  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Upton and Chairman Whitfield:

We are writing to request that you hold a hearing to examine the connection between climate change and the severe drought in the West, as well as the physical and economic effects of the drought.

Scientists have long predicted that climate change would increase the intensity and duration of droughts.<sup>1</sup> In 2009, a report from the U.S. Global Change Research Program projected that climate change would drive longer, more frequent, and more severe droughts in the Southwest.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the report found that the frequency of drought in much of the West has already increased.<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Overpeck, an atmospheric scientist from the University of Arizona, testified in 2011: “There is broad agreement in the climate science research community that in the Southwest... the warmer atmosphere will lead to more frequent and more severe (drier) droughts in the future. All of the above changes have already started, in large part driven by human-caused climate change.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis. Contribution of Working Group I to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (Jan. 30, 2014) (online at [www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1](http://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/wg1)).

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Global Change Research Program, *Global Climate Change Impacts in the United States*, at 33, 42 (Jun. 16, 2009) (online at [nca2009.globalchange.gov](http://nca2009.globalchange.gov)).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 33.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, Testimony of Dr. Jonathan Overpeck, Co-Director, Institute of the Environment, Professor of Atmospheric Sciences, University of Arizona, *Hearing on Current Drought Conditions Affecting New Mexico and the Secure Water Act Reports Regarding Climate Change Impacts on Water*, 112th Cong. (Apr. 27,

Current conditions in California track the scientists' predictions.<sup>5</sup> The year 2013 was the driest year ever in California, and this winter threatens to become the third consecutive year under drought conditions.<sup>6</sup> With only 3.6 inches of rain in all of 2013, Los Angeles experienced its driest year ever.<sup>7</sup> Nine of California's twelve major reservoirs are more than 50% below capacity.<sup>8</sup>

Already, the drought is imposing severe harm on the state, and the effects are worsening. Dangerously low water levels are threatening drinking water supplies, agricultural production, and endangered aquatic species. There is an extreme risk of catastrophic wild fires, and the Governor of California has declared a drought emergency.<sup>9</sup>

This year, for the first time ever in its 54 year history, the State Water Project will provide zero water supplies to the city and agricultural water districts it services.<sup>10</sup> Normally, this vast water storage and delivery system provides water supplies for 25 million Californians -- two-thirds of the state's population -- and 750,000 acres of irrigated farmland across Northern California, the San Francisco Bay Area, the San Joaquin Valley, the Central Coast, and Southern California.<sup>11</sup> Seventeen rural communities, home to 40,000 people, are in danger of running out

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2011) (online at [www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2011/4/hearing-4b915ba8-f802-02d0-bd1d-9515713e419a](http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2011/4/hearing-4b915ba8-f802-02d0-bd1d-9515713e419a)).

<sup>5</sup> National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, *California Facing Worst Drought on Record* (Jan. 29, 2014) (online at [www.climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/california-facing-worst-drought-record](http://www.climate.gov/news-features/event-tracker/california-facing-worst-drought-record)).

<sup>6</sup> *Driest year ever in Calif. Sparks fire, water fears*, USA Today (Dec. 26, 2013) (online at [www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2013/12/26/california-drought-water-shortage-wildfires/4192275/](http://www.usatoday.com/story/weather/2013/12/26/california-drought-water-shortage-wildfires/4192275/)).

<sup>7</sup> *Record Driest Year in California, Parts of Oregon*, The Weather Channel (Jan. 2, 2014) (online at [www.weather.com/news/weather-forecast/california-record-driest-year-20131115](http://www.weather.com/news/weather-forecast/california-record-driest-year-20131115)).

<sup>8</sup> California Department of Water Resources, California Data Exchange Center, *Conditions for Major Reservoirs* (online at [cdec.water.ca.gov/cdecapp/resapp/getResGraphsMain.action](http://cdec.water.ca.gov/cdecapp/resapp/getResGraphsMain.action)).

<sup>9</sup> *Brown Declares California drought emergency*, San Jose Mercury News (Jan. 17, 2014) (online at [www.mercurynews.com/science/ci\\_24933924/california-drought-emergency-declared-by-gov-jerry-brown](http://www.mercurynews.com/science/ci_24933924/california-drought-emergency-declared-by-gov-jerry-brown)).

<sup>10</sup> *The California Drought, As Seen From Space*, National Journal (Feb. 4, 2014) (online at [www.nationaljournal.com/energy/the-california-drought-as-seen-from-space-20140204](http://www.nationaljournal.com/energy/the-california-drought-as-seen-from-space-20140204)).

<sup>11</sup> California Department of Water Resources, *California State Water Project Overview* (online at [www.water.ca.gov/swp/](http://www.water.ca.gov/swp/)).

of water in 60 to 120 days.<sup>12</sup> For the first time ever, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife banned recreational fishing on dozens of the state's streams to protect endangered salmon and steelhead.<sup>13</sup> Already wildfires have burned in Los Angeles County, and a particularly dangerous wildfire season is expected due to the drought conditions.<sup>14</sup>

The economic costs of the drought are mounting quickly. Lost revenue from agriculture alone could reach \$5 billion in 2014, according to the California Farm Water Coalition.<sup>15</sup> Farmers are letting land lay fallow and selling off livestock as water allotments are reduced by state agencies. Ranchers are reporting triple their normal costs for raising cattle.<sup>16</sup> In the Central Valley, where one third of the jobs are related to farming, the drought is increasing unemployment.<sup>17</sup>

The American people are beginning to suffer the costs – both economic and environmental – of extreme weather connected to climate change. The Committee needs to understand the connection between climate change and drought in California and the Western United States, as well as the effects of severe droughts. We urge you to hold a hearing on this critically important issue.

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<sup>12</sup> *Severe Drought has U.S. West Fearing Worst*, New York Times (Feb. 1, 2014) (online at [www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/us/severe-drought-has-us-west-fearing-worst.html?hpw&rref=us&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/02/us/severe-drought-has-us-west-fearing-worst.html?hpw&rref=us&_r=0)).

<sup>13</sup> *California orders dozens of streams closed to fishing as drought worsens*, The Sacramento Bee (Jan. 31, 2014) (online at [www.sacbee.com/2014/01/31/6116936/california-orders-dozens-of-streams.html](http://www.sacbee.com/2014/01/31/6116936/california-orders-dozens-of-streams.html)).

<sup>14</sup> *California fights wildfire, expects more as drought emergency declared*, CNN (Jan. 17, 2014) (online at [www.cnn.com/2014/01/17/us/california-wildfire/](http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/17/us/california-wildfire/)).

<sup>15</sup> *California Farms Going Thirsty as Drought Burns \$5 Billion Hole*, Bloomberg News (Jan. 28, 2014) (online at [www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-01-29/california-farms-going-thirsty-as-drought-burns-5-billion-hole.html](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2014-01-29/california-farms-going-thirsty-as-drought-burns-5-billion-hole.html)).

<sup>16</sup> *Cattle ranchers feel brunt of the drought; some fear costs will triple*, The Sacramento Bee (Feb. 4, 2014) (online at [www.sacbee.com/2014/01/26/6101551/cattle-ranchers-feel-brunt-of.html](http://www.sacbee.com/2014/01/26/6101551/cattle-ranchers-feel-brunt-of.html)).

<sup>17</sup> *California Farmers Brace for Drought, Unemployment*, ABC News (Feb. 2, 2014) (online at [abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/california-farmers-brace-drought-unemployment-22335597](http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/california-farmers-brace-drought-unemployment-22335597)).



Sincerely,

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